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# A DECONSTRUCTIONIST ALTERNATIVE IN A POST-DEVELOPMENT AFRICA

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## INTRODUCTION

The Chancellor of Covenant University, Dr. David Olaniyi Oyedepo, the Vice Chancellor, Professor Charles Ayo, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Prof. Taiwo Abioye, the Registrar, other members of management, faculty, staff, and students, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, I am indeed honored to be given this opportunity to lecture on the need to rebrand Africa. I cannot thank the University enough for the invitation, and you all for your presence; I am most grateful.

On March 6th, 1957, Ghana's first President, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, in his independence speech, stated:

... We must realize that from now on, we are no longer a colonial but free and independent people. "... As I pointed out, that also entails hard work. This new Africa is ready to fight his own battles and show that after all the black man is capable of managing his own affairs. ... We are going to demonstrate to the world, to the other nations, that we are prepared to lay our foundation – our own African personality.

Dr. Nkrumah advocated two important objectives – image and affairs – that drive this presentation. I will discuss (a) our identities and the negative images within the international community and (b) how such images interact with strategies to impede our growth. Partially grounded in Nkrumah's proclamation of self-reliance, I examine (a) the nature and etiology of our image and identities, (b) our application of modernization and neoliberal economic policies, and (c) the postmodernists' perspective of post-development and its criticisms of modernization and neoliberalism. The resultant framework espousing deconstructions of the said identities is juxtaposed with Hernando de Soto's (2000) theory of dead capital, which attempts an explanation of why "capitalism triumphs in the West but fails everywhere else" and concludes that poor people are not wealthy because they have no possessions, but because they do not turn such belongings into wealth-

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generating assets.

## **OUR DENIGRATED IMAGES AND IDENTITIES: HISTORICAL CONTEXTS AND ETIOLOGY**

Numerous explanatory factors – most of which are beyond the scope of this presentation – interact to define contemporary socioeconomic conditions of African nations, our image, and identities. The intersection of these factors and other conditions corrode the potency of our economies atrophying the very foundation our forefathers so passionately proclaimed. Some scholars distinguish between image and identity and conceptualize identities as the self-concepts we hold of ourselves, while image comprises the views others perceive of us. Today, several decades after that historic speech, I stand before this August audience to ask: where is that foundation – our growth strategies; what is our personality – our image within the international community; and how have we managed the affairs of the nations of this great and extensively endowed continent?

We are partly defined as the “dark continent” characterized by primeval irrationality, tribal anarchy, civil war, political instability, flagrant corruption, incompetent leadership and managerial ineptitude, hunger, famine and starvation as well as rampant diseases, especially AIDS. Africa is seen as a homogenous entity comprising of uncivilized and heathen peoples who are culturally, intellectually, politically and technically backward or inferior, who are incapable of governing themselves, or at least embracing democratic principles of governance. The African continent is depicted as the “dependent Africa”, “crisis driven Africa and “hopeless” or “pitiable Africa”. (Michira, 2002)

Michira's (2000) definition above eloquently summarizes our image to others. This denigration of Africa and the people of African ancestry began centuries ago. Around the 12th Century, we were perceived as

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black slaves who ate herbs growing along the Nile, and on the fields, went about naked, and did not possess the level of intelligence of ordinary men, cohabiting with sisters (Poncian, 2015). Nineteenthth century philosopher of history, Hegel, wrote, “that Africa was not a historical continent, that it was capable of neither development nor education... ” (Fage, 1989 in Poncian, 2015: 73). According to Poncian (2015), other writers saw us as the sons of Ham, sub-humans, and incapable of “any meaningful intellectual, cultural, and historical accomplishments or experience. Through colonization, other concepts defining us included fantastical beasts and cannibals, slaves and backward races.”

French President Sarkozy in a much-criticized speech of 2007 at the University of Cheikh Anta Diop, Senegal described Africans:

The tragedy of Africa is that the African has not fully entered into history. The African peasant, who for thousands of years has lived according to the seasons, whose life's ideal was to be in harmony with nature, only knew the eternal renewal of time, rhymed by the endless repetition of the same gestures and the same words. In this imaginary world where everything starts over and over again, there is no place for human adventure or for the idea of progress. ... This man (the traditional African) never launched himself towards the future. The idea never came to him to get out of this repetition and to invent his own destiny. The problem of Africa, and allow a friend of Africa to say it, is to be found here. (Sarkozy, 2007)

In this speech, Sarkozy probably represented the views of his colleagues, playing the devil's advocate to sensitize us to the negativities within the international community about us. This is because his words reechoed some of the views of Hegel centuries before him:

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Africa proper is shut up from the rest of the world by its geography as

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well as by the strange character of her peoples. Africans lack the category of universality. “This arises from the fact that they are one with their existence; they are arrested in immediacy. This means that they have not separated themselves from nature....” .... (Ilo, 2006: 43, 44)



The word map above typifies Africa's image to the rest of the world – specifically among Westerners and the people of North America (Congo Story, 2015). While I do not particularly accept the image it espouses, I explore its attributes to instigate independent evaluation of the nature and extent of Africa's active agency in the generation of our current identities and images, which simultaneously compound the states of our deplorable and almost stagnant economies. Nepotism, the selfish scramble for wealth (by public servants, private citizens, and our political leaders) and the mismanagement and ineffective implementation of policies – appreciably injudicious – could be

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included on the map. Although not necessarily disconnected from the outcomes of external agencies that disintegrate our image, these traits persist as influential by-products of our actions and inactions.

The causes of Africa's negative identities are varied and include the role of colonizers and political leaders, international media and film, literature, the activities of international non-governmental organizations, and the classification of nations through economic growth. I categorize these factors into: (a) media, advocacy and scholarship and (b) politics and leadership.

## **ROLE OF MEDIA AND ADVOCACY IN PROJECTING NEGATIVE IMAGES OF AFRICA**

Media in this context includes both electronic and print, and comprises of radio, television, newspapers and magazines, and Internet based news reports. I also classify movies, both African and non-African, under this section. For decades, the news coverage on Africa has been without depth (Ogundimu, 1994) but replete with images symbolizing the whole continent in terms of poverty, famine, wars and violence, laziness, and diseases. We are the continent that, in the eyes of non-Africans, epitomizes primitivism, the AIDS epidemic and other deadly infectious diseases, greed, selfishness, poverty, and corruption. As Araya (2008) put it: "... this notion is perpetuated continually with images and language, misinformation and racism, and media blitz and negative attention." If disasters occur, their reports create long-standing concepts about Africa. When the first Portuguese landed on the Continent close to 1500 years ago, many of them perished through malaria, which was new to them. Since then, diseases and epidemics have remained a major part of our images. In the early 1980s, Ethiopia suffered famine, and charity organizations, particularly Live Aid, captured images of emaciated children with which they campaigned for support. Decades later, the entire continent suffers that label of hunger. Recently in a second grade class in the United States, a

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teacher used body parts to symbolize the various continents to enhance the learners' ability to recall the material. Africa was represented with the stomach because, as she explained, it is the continent of hunger.

In 2014 during America's mid-year elections, the relevance of this portrayal of negativity about Africa was illuminated. Two themes about the continent characterized the campaign platforms of Republicans, and they were “Nigeria's Boko Haram”, and “Africa's Ebola.” Throughout the campaigns, we heard criticisms and counter-criticisms of the Obama administration's response to these African plagues and how they threatened the health and security of Americans – living in America. The elections were held, the intended impacts were realized, and very little was heard about these themes again. Since the premiere of Tarzan the Ape series of the 1930s (Dunn, 1996), several Hollywood pictures have perpetrated negative constructions of Africa and its people, as projected in news reports. Recall Independence Day (1996), Hotel Rwanda (2004), Last King of Scotland (2006), The Interpreter (2005), and Blood Diamond (2006) (Poncian, 2005). These movies symbolized Africa in pictures that were “... so endearing that they created lasting impressions that defined the continent as “other to the “economically developed,” safe West (Evans & Glenn, 2010, p. 15 in Poncian, 2015: 75).

Araya (2008) contends that the perpetuation of such identities engender a kind of saviour movement, with many individuals and organizations pursuing the goals of rescuing Africans from these calamities. International non-governmental organizations, an important player in the saviour movement, campaign and solicit funding in support of Africans. Their advertisements, print and electronic, must be convincing enough to win the sympathy and compassion of potential donors. International NGOs claim, among others, that poverty affects all African children, and without their donations, such children go without food, health, education, and clothing. Although probably well intentioned, their activities latently construct Africa as poor and helpless – through images that are solid, harmful, and lasting, at least in the minds of non-Africans. Live Aid's



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photos of starving Ethiopian children, which I mentioned earlier, is a typical example, however successful the campaign was in saving families, providing access to formal education, and health. To many, that is the only face of Africa.

Here is a photo labeled, “Hunger”, obtained from the website of Nigeria Intel on July 15, 2015.



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**The United Earth Organization (<http://www.ueog.org/Goals.php>) used the next photo to solicit funding for the world's poor.**



**The Polity Blog, in questioning the effectiveness of new approaches of presenting positive images in charity campaigns, posted the following picture:**



**On the same page, the Polity Blog shared the picture below supposedly championing new and aesthetic – positive images – campaign trends of Africa.**



The bubble of such images within a cross-section of the saviour movement, especially charity organizations, has however exploded; the consequence being the desensitization of people to the projected deprivation. A recent survey of 2000 UK residents by Oxfam Charity confirmed the counter-effects of such negativity, revealing that people have become “desensitised” to such images (Nigeria Intel, 2012). Nigeria Intel (2012) discloses participants believed “over-exposure to negative media and advertising portrayals of Africa and developing countries in other parts of the world was “depressing, manipulative and hopeless.” Also reporting on the findings of this study, Hungry News, in a January 17, 2013 report captioned: “Should Anti-Hunger Campaigning still be Using Shock-Tactic Imagery?” remarked: “... the use of these images isn't a sustainable campaigning tactic - with 3 out of 4 people having become desensitised to them. Ultimately we can't keep being moved by images of hunger and starvation ....” The perception that the photo of the happy child above was merely aesthetic implied that the new trend of positivity has not been successful.

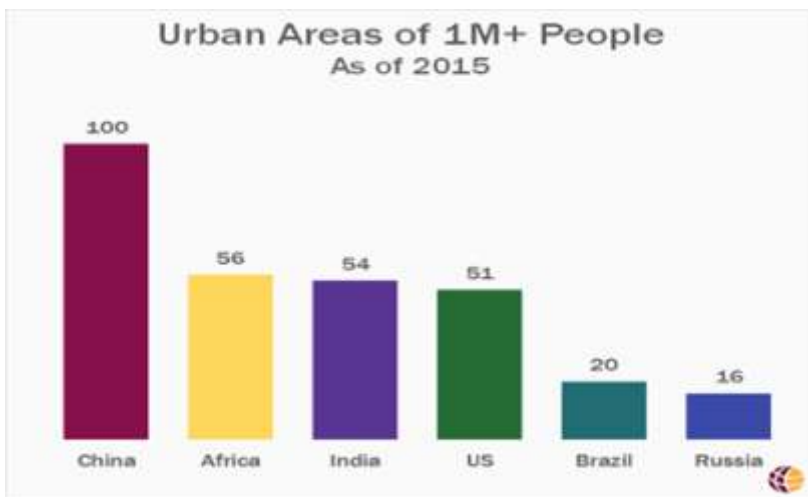
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Academics have also been influential in the perpetuation of negativities about Africa. Titles of books aimed at enhancing their marketability are one way that authors influence Africa's image. For the same reason, they may present arguments as well as overgeneralization that may not project any positive traits of the many cultures on this continent. Conscious efforts are made by authors to create and market an image of Africa that may be appealing to the West but not a true reflection of the African peoples. In a highly publicized text on how to write about Africa, Wainaina (1992) discouraged writers from making "references to African writers or intellectuals, mention of school-going children who are not suffering from yaws or Ebola fever or female genital mutilation..." or "... have a picture of a well-adjusted African ..." as the book cover, "... or in it, unless that African has won the Nobel Prize." The author believed Africans were better represented with an AK-47 and further tutored:

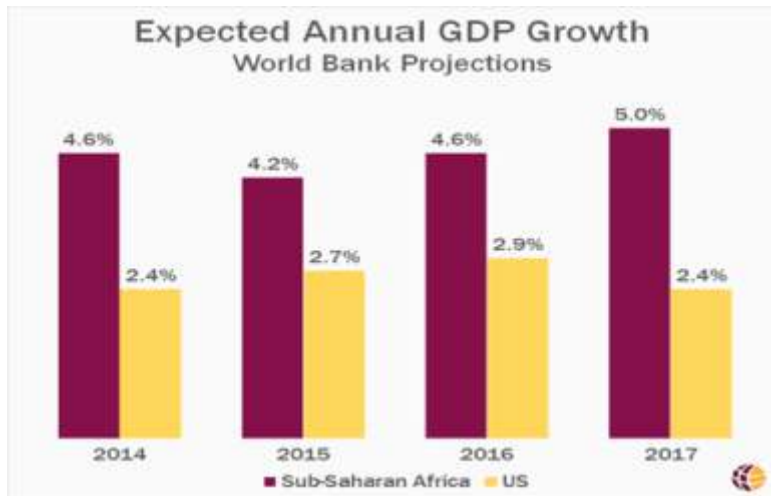
In your text, treat Africa as if it were one country. ... Africa is to be pitied, worshipped or dominated. Whichever angle you take, be sure to leave the strong impression that without your intervention and your important book, Africa is doomed. ... Among your characters you must always include The Starving African, who wanders the refugee camp nearly naked, and waits for the benevolence of the West. Her children have flies on their eyelids and pot bellies, and her breasts are flat and empty. She must look utterly helpless. She can have no past, no history; such diversions ruin the dramatic moment. ... Also be sure to include a warm and motherly woman who has a rolling laugh and who is concerned for your well-being.... The biggest taboo in writing about Africa is to describe or show dead or suffering white people. ... Always end your book with Nelson Mandela saying something about rainbows or renaissances. ... Because you care. (Wainaina, 1992).

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Throughout this presentation, you notice that the identities and images projected are reflections of the above write-up. Many renowned world leaders conform to such constructions and define us in homogenous terms, as one country instead of the 54 nations or a continent endowed with rich resources and culture. In a 2012 Republican presidential debate, for example, candidate Santorum in answering a question on poverty commented: “American action in Africa to deal with their AIDS epidemic is “absolutely essential...Africa was A COUNTRY (emphasis mine) on the brink of complete meltdown and chaos....” In the chart below, Michael Johnston (2015) writes to highlight the market viability and potential of Africa's population and growth, but he makes the comparison with countries instead of other continents:



Similarly, a World Bank projection of growth rates over a 5-year period compared the entire sub-Saharan Africa with the United States as is depicted in the following chart:



These are distortions that could be misleading because  
Africa is not a country:



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## **ROLE OF POLITICS AND LEADERSHIP IN THE CONSTRUCTIONS OF NEGATIVE AFRICAN IMAGE**

Political leaders, both African and non-Africans, have been active agents in the management of our affairs and our images. I classify the influences of Non-African leaders into (a) justification for colonization and the domination of African nations and (b) their role in African economies' poor performance and dependency. The latter role intercepts African leadership in the construction of our identities through our nations' adoption of IMF and World Bank recommendations entrenched in modernization and neoliberal economic policies. A cross-section of the literature believes negativities of African image persist to justify colonization, the enslavement of African people through the Atlantic Slave Trade, and the continued exploitation of the transfer of wealth from the African continent. By projecting images of Africa that is weak, extremely poor, vulnerable, and incapable of managing its own affairs, the saviour movement may not be the lone outcome, but also the disaffection for Africa particularly among the Diaspora populations of African ancestry. Additionally, the images create inferiority complexes among Africans and their leaders, which potentially weakens their bargaining powers.

The role of non-Africans in our economic dependency and the associated negativities transcend our reliance on major players within the international community to include other agencies, predominantly non-governmental, whose activities principally aim at the reduction or elimination of poverty among Africans and other people. Mass advocacy campaigns by prominent celebrities like Bono of U-2 fame, Angelina Jolie, and Madonna are examples (Easterly, 2008). According to Easterly (2008), Angelina Jolie toured Kenya in 2005 with Jeffery Sachs of Columbia University; and Bono, Queen Rania of

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Jordan, and Bill Gates participated in panel discussions on African affairs at the 2008 World Economic Forum. Unarguably, these scholars, celebrities, and business executives have meant well, and their activities have been direct responses to the negative media campaigns and in some cases, appeals from our governments. There probably is nothing wrong when they embark on campaigns to raise funds to feed, clothe, and educate underprivileged children around the world.

When world leaders within the saviour movement sacrifice part of their budgets to support the so called “Third World” nations, their goals may be far from denigrating the leaders of these nations or the pursuits of any agenda to compensate for the exploitations of the past. Like non-governmental charity agencies, such governments may only be responding to pressures from their constituents, the media, celebrity campaigns, and requests from beneficiary nations. At the 2000 Millennium Summit of the United Nations, member states adopted the Millennium Declaration and subsequently, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to ensure universal basic enrollment of all children of school going age, cut poverty by half, improve access to clean water, and reduce infant mortality rates by year 2015. When the G-8 met in 2005, they pledged to double foreign aid to Africa from \$25 billion to \$50 billion by 2010. Such funds, they agreed, would be utilized on development programmes and to forgive debts (Easterly, 2008).

## **ROLE OF AFRICAN LEADERS IN NEGATIVE IMAGES THROUGH EPOCHS OF MODERNIZATION AND NEOLIBERALISM**

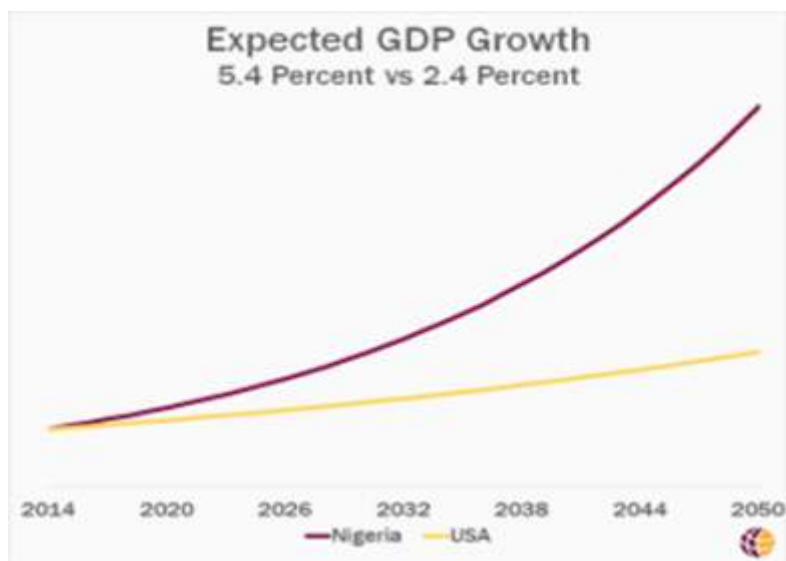
The actions and inactions of African leaders provide the impetus for the emergence and sustenance of our negative images (Poncian, 2015)



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and poor economic performance. Corrupt leadership and over-dependence on foreign aid partly signal our failure to maximize nature's endowments and our ability to manage our own affairs. Nevertheless, irrespective of the conclusions to be drawn from this presentation, many African nations have performed outstandingly over the years. The problem, however, is the fragility of their economies, which partly emanate from the factors I outline. For instance, offshore oil drilling and booms in the gold, cocoa and other commodities market, extremely attractive to foreign investors, fuelled Ghana's economy in recent times (Minter, 2015). In 2011, it was ranked the fastest growing economy around the world, with approximately 14-20% reported growth rate (CNN, 2015; Financial Times, 2011; Joy Online, 2011). By the end of 2013, it was considered the fastest growing economy in sub-Saharan Africa (GNA, 2013). The Business Insider ranked 10 African nations among the top 20 fastest growing economies in 2012. Ghana made the list at 16th, Guinea at 3rd, and South Sudan at 2nd. Currently, Kenya is the 3rd fastest growing economy around the world and Nigeria the 6th (Bloomberg, 2015). However, the Sloman Economics (2015) has ranked Nigeria as the fastest growing economy in Africa today. Considered a major force to reckon with, it is the only African nation among the MINT economies, which are Mexico, Indonesia, Nigeria, and Turkey. The MINT, according to Jim O'Neil who coined the term, are emerging economic giants that “beyond having a lot of people,” ... “have really good “inner” demographics” whose dynamics could propel them unto the same double digit levels as China between 2003 and 2008 if they get their act together (The BBC, 2014). In 2012, United States President Obama declared Nigeria world's major economic giant (House Committee on Diaspora Affairs, 2014). It is projected that between now and 2050, Nigeria's economy will expand at a rate of 5.4% as against America's projected 2.4% (Johnston, 2015)

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Antithetical to these internationally lauded attainments are the fragile economies and the lack of substantial improvements in the living conditions of our average citizens. In 2014, Ghana was able to manage only a 4.1% growth rate, and “The slide wouldn't have been so steep...” if its “... government had been diligent about managing its oil and tax revenues during better times. But the country largely failed to save or invest its commodities windfalls” (Minter, 2015). Many sub-Saharan African nations continue to relish in commendations because the departure from dictatorship seem more welcoming. Regrettably, conditions that begat successive overthrows of democratically elected governments survived military governance and have endured the test of time. It appears irrespective of our growth and success, the lack of welfare and the economic misery of our citizens persist (Dambosa, 2010); the disconnection between our economic growth and poverty among our citizens is conspicuous (Hauge, 2014). Indeed, researchers predict a positive correlation

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between Nigeria's economic growth and its poverty levels because improvements in GDPs tend to correspond with widening gaps between the rich and the poor (Kale, 2012).

World Bank, International Monetary Fund, and numerous other reports typically suggest Africa's poor live on \$1.25 per day. In 2010, nearly 61% of Nigerians lived below the poverty line and could not afford basic needs including food (National Bureau of Statistics, 2011). This was an increase from the 2004 statistic of nearly 55%. Primary school enrollment in Nigeria decreased from 93% in 2007 to 85% in 2010 even as – within the same period – the country keenly effected its programmes of MDG of which improved access to and quality education formed major components (Ogujiuba & Jumare, 2012). Recent visits to a number of Nigeria's primary schools with some of my colleagues discovered appalling states of overcrowding where classrooms that should otherwise hold 30 to 40 pupils had well over 100 children crammed in poorly lit classrooms whose ceilings were dropping and showed signs of serious leakages, thus reflecting potential weaknesses in the MDG programmes and the disconnections between economic success and the realities facing our people. Some scholars attribute such disparities to population increases disproportionate to economic growth (Hauge, 2014), but my economist colleagues will agree with me that this would be a concern if we had exceeded the optimum utilization of our resources.

Year in and out, foreign nations reiterate their commitment to the fight against poverty and diseases plaguing the African continent and elsewhere. The programmes for such support have either been transformational or marginal. According to William Easterly (2008), the proponents of transformational programmes saw “very rapid and comprehensive social change as possible, emanating from an elite of

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political leaders and outside experts who can start from a blank slate in achieving development (3, 4). Modernization and neoliberalist driven policies under the structural adjustment programmes (SAP) including the “big push” ideas of Rostow, highly conservative, were transformational and thus rapid. Proponents of the marginal approach to growth, Easterly further writes, perceive

... only gradual social change as possible ..., emanating more from the emergent self-organizing order of many decentralized private entrepreneurs, creative inventors, and one-step-at-a-time political reformers, all constrained by existing traditions and social norms that have evolved for their own reasons over a long period. (Easterly, 2008)

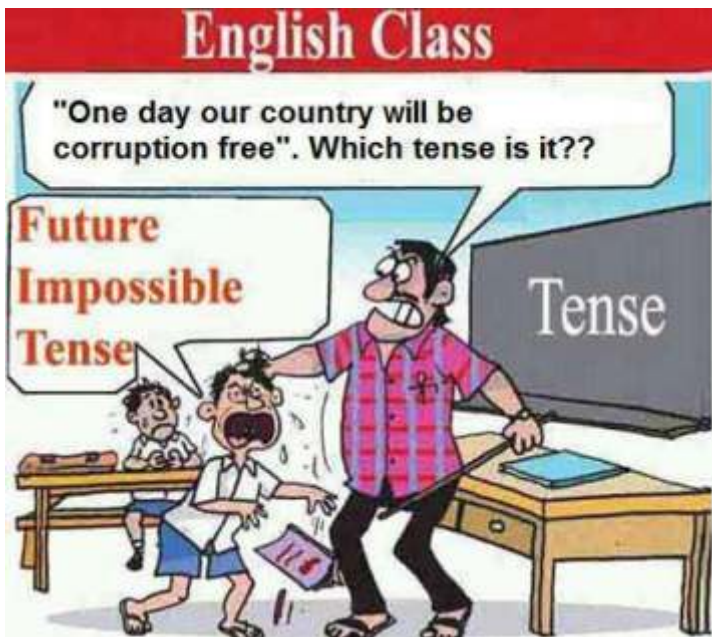
Some of the policies under the Millennium Development Goals, which are specific and decentralized, as well as many of those funded through individual country's aid agencies, such as the USAID, may be marginal and gradual. Due to mismanagement, misappropriation, and corruption, however, these programmes commonly become cyclical, rather than gradual or rapid, because once they are ineffective, they get out of fashion and as other programmes continue to fail, our developmentalists resort to reinstating them (Easterly, 2008). It is probably against this background that Sarkozy admonished us to break away from our past:

Africa's problem is to stop always repeating, always mulling over, to liberate itself from the myth of the eternal return. It is to realise that the golden age that Africa is forever recalling will not return because it has never existed. Africa's problem is that it lives the present too much in nostalgia for a lost childhood paradise. (Sarkozy, 2007)

It is difficult to put the blame of the failure of these programmes at the doorstep of the benefactors considering the passion with which some

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of them advocate for change and growth, albeit on grounds of ignorance, at times, and based on the images we intend to rid. Our leaders approach these governments and aid agencies practically begging for support and knowing that if approved, there would be guidelines that may – even if temporarily – affect the living conditions of the average citizen. Unfortunately, the funds are misappropriated or siphoned illicitly into personal ventures, leaving the states with very little to show for their mounting debts. Corruption does not only erode nations of huge sums of money, but also provides the fodder for the negative reporting in international news media.



Source: FAADOO

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A recent Gallup poll of 2012 indicated that about 94% of Nigerians believed their government is corrupt (The Nigerian Observer, 2015), while recent newspaper reports claim billions of dollars in earnings from the oil industry are reportedly unaccounted for. According to Transparency International (TI), Nigeria ranked 144th out of 177 countries measured in the Corruption Perception Index, making it the 33rd most corrupt nation among those studied in 2013. This position improved in 2014 when it emerged 38th most corrupt among 174 nations (The Nigerian Observer, 2015). In Ghana, several newspaper reports accuse the current government of dubious judgment debts and payments for non-existing projects or services amounting to millions of dollars. In 2012 and 2013, Ghana ranked 46 and 45 in TI's corruption perception index but improved marginally in 2014 when it ranked 61. In both 2012 and 2014, Afro Barometer's surveys concluded Ghanaians regarded Ghana government officials as the second most corrupt agency of the country (Afro Barometer, 2015).

The concept of modernity – an epochal term characterizing the era that succeeded the Middle Ages when primary economic relations comprised feudalism, was perceived by many renowned philosophers such as Descartes and those who championed enlightenment to thrive on reason, and thus had the potential of creating systematic knowledge and truth. There was a conviction that through reason, we could discover adequate theoretical and practical norms that would provide the fodder for new systems of thought and societies. Modernity would become a part of mainstream cultures through the spread of arts that were considered modern. In time, a consumer society with corresponding forms of new technology, secularization, transportation, and communication would emerge. There was industrialization, and the process of arriving at that stage of modernity and industrialization became known as modernization.

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For decades after independence, many African nations pursued modernization-driven economic and development programmes founded upon the ideologies of enlightenment, positivism, and pure scientific reasoning, because modernization was in vogue. Rostow's (1962) five-stage transformational theory of modernization typified some of the approaches adopted. The stages were: (a) pre-modern, (b) pre-conditions for take off, (c) take off, (d) drive to maturity, and (e) the state of mass consumption. Over the years, some African governments have demonstrated a fixation on the take off stage while the ultimate goal of mass consumption has remained relatively unattainable. The take off state consists of increased urbanization and industrialization relative to agriculture as well as expansions in the proceeds from such growth amidst technological breakthroughs. Had we successfully progressed through the fifth stage of mass consumption, the demand for high value goods like automobiles would be huge, and consumers would have disposable income in excess of basics needs. I argue that while our peers at independence – Malaysia, Singapore etc. – pursued states of mass consumption, we seemed content with take off. As recent as the 1990s, a first lady of Ghana championing the governments' accomplishments proclaimed the nation would soon enter the take off stage, even though that was no guarantee for social inclusion. Less than three months ago, the Vice President of Ghana applauded the government's 2015 IMF bailout and noted it would ensure economic take off over the next few months.

The application of such policies amidst neoliberal economic frameworks alienated the masses from strong cultural ties and denied them assistance from their governments. Pre-modern structures targeted for elimination comprised long-standing African traditions – vital and unique – that had remained core components of survival strategies and were probably indispensable for the change and

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improvements pursued through economic growth and development; such practices functionally set them apart from all others. Given the differential trajectories and distinct ecological conditions of African and European countries and actual disconnections between the programmes and realities that faced African economies, is it any wonder that these plans and projects failed to steer us unto the realms of positive identities and the ability to manage our affairs?

Neoliberal economic policies mandated deregulations and encouraged the divestiture of state entrepreneurship and retrenchments, which reduced household incomes, worsened unemployment, and intensified self-reliance at the household level, even as we failed to attain the stage of mass consumption. The policies thrived on strategies disconnected from the African realities and excluded welfare schemes that buoyed struggling families living on low incomes and subsistence farming. But welfarist ethos existed in some European and North American nations because of the logic that if a large proportion of the population could not afford clean water, health care, or education for their children, long-term corporate interests of the society would be undermined (Ekanade, 2014). Considering the structures of many African households, any laudable economic growth was hollow and inconsequential if the related successes disenfranchised the people and entailed socioeconomic exclusions. When families could hardly afford three healthy meals a day, bare medical expenses, foot educational bills, and cover other basic needs, the denial of welfare benefits simply set these nations on time bombs. When Ghana implemented SAPs, for instance, households that lived on fixed incomes resorted to multiple modes of livelihood (MML) (Owusu, 2001). MML entailed the reliance of households on diverse sources to augment their fixed earnings whose real values had dwindled because of currency depreciation and



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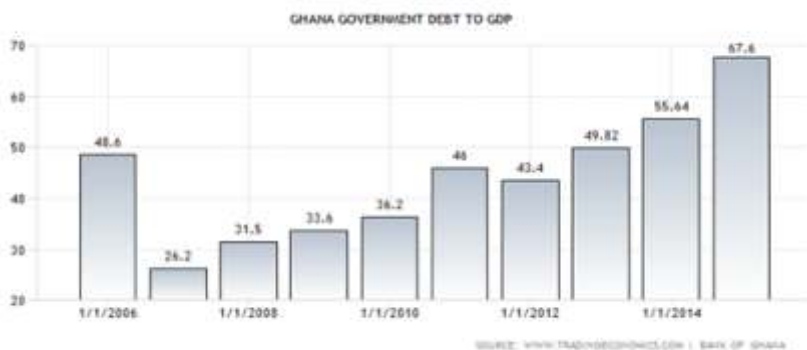
inflation from neoliberal economic policies. The struggle to maintain decent living standards under such conditions did not necessarily increase crime rates, but MML potentially compelled households to fortify their survival through abusive child labour and trafficking, corruption and fraud (Derby, 2012, 2010, 2009; Verlet, 2000). This is particularly problematic when the removal of such subsidies merely expand the pool of funds that corrupt leaders could steal from.

In 2015, Ghana entered IMF dictated bailout programmes whose strings have once again driven the government to follow neoliberal strategies that affirm the cyclical nature of failed policies. The current bailout provides \$918 million over a 3-year period and compels Ghana to improve the transparency of its budget processes and expenditure, a civil service hiring freeze, a 17.5% tax on petroleum, and the removal of energy subsidies (International Monetary Fund, 2015; Minter, 2015). Critics question the prudence of the bailout option since the amount misappropriated through dubious judgment debts and payments for non-existent services and projects alone far exceed the \$918 million loan. On July 11, 2015, the Business Insider listed Ghana among 14 nations at risk of “spiraling towards government debt crises.” In that article, Judith Tyson of the Overseas Development Institutes recalls how after 2005, a number of countries became beneficiaries of debt relief programmes to enable them escalate their growth but lamented

that a number of [the] countries have since “loaded up” on debt – and while some governments had invested the money wisely, diversifying their economies and improving infrastructure, others have not. She points to Ghana, in West Africa, where a sharp increase in borrowing has been spent on what she calls “pork-barrel politics. They've spent it in a frivolous way.”.... (Business Insider, 2015)

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Earlier in April, the IMF warned Ghana could hit the 70% debt mark by December and officially become a highly indebted poor country (HIPC) again (Wiafe, 2015). In 2001, the government of Ghana signed up for HIPC initiative (Bank of Ghana, 2005), which implied that the nation had become bankrupt. The benefits of this programme were debt forgiveness and increased opportunities of interest-free grants with the long-term goal of weaning Ghana off the dependency on international loans. This effectively reduced its debt to GDP ratio to 26.2% by 2007, the lowest in its history. In 2009 when President Obama visited, he lauded the country for “working for the people of Ghana, and not just the few,” and told Ghanaians it was “a wonderful success story economically” (Minter, 2015).



Unfortunately, Ghana could not sustain the new low debt to GDP ratio. Less than 10 years after exiting the HIPC initiative, its debt has surged once more, constituting nearly 68% of its GDP, and with very little to show for it. Minter writes:

JUST a few years ago, Ghana seemed to be one of Africa's few good news stories. The country was on a path to paying back the international creditors it had relied on for decades, and was widely lauded for managing five peaceful and democratic transitions of

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power since 1992. ... [T]here's little sign the government spent wisely, either. Roads throughout Ghana are poorly maintained and over capacity. There are also obvious deficiencies in the country's energy infrastructure. And none of this is news to the government. (Minter, 2015)

Some justify such reckless spending, arguing that numerous Western and North American nations have worse debt to GDP ratios (USA: 101.53; Italy: 132; Canada: 86.51; Japan: 230; Euro Area: 91.9; Germany: 74.7; France: 95; UK: 89.4; and Spain: 97.7), but they also have quality living standards and are even able to extend support to dependent economies.

## **APPLICATION OF DECONSTRUCTIONISM AND THE REVIVAL OF OUR DEAD CAPITAL**

I conclude this lecture with a focus on two recommendations: (a) post-development Africa: the deconstructionist approach and (b) reviving our dead capital.

### **STEP ONE: POST-DEVELOPMENT AFRICA: A DECONSTRUCTIONIST APPROACH**

The paradigms of science, positivism, and objectivism have, indisputably been effective in advocating change across the world. Nevertheless, they have also been the vehicle for the hierarchization of culture and knowledge, much of which are located in binary opposites such as developed/underdeveloped, north/south, modern/primitive, and first and third worlds, although the latter has no ideological relevance in contemporary geopolitical dynamics. Other dichotomies have been developed or highly industrialized on one hand, and underdeveloped, less developed, least developed, and

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developing or highly indebted poor countries (HIPC) on the other. As we internalize these labels of subordination, we establish inferior identities of defeatism that are crippling, strip us of any abilities to rise and compete sufficiently and independently, and thus thrust us unto eternal realms of misguided programmes and dependencies.

In his 2007 speech that I referred to earlier, Sarkozy said our “fate is first of all in y[our] hands.” While I disagree with his denigrating tone and remarks, I am certain we have no problem with his appreciation of our arts and culture and the contributions our ancestors made to civilization. He reminded us of how the West learnt from our arts and culture, and went on to state:

I therefore want to say, to the youth of Africa, that the tragedy of Africa does not come from the idea that the African soul would be impervious to logic and to reason. Because, the African is as logic[al] and as reasonable as the European. (Sarkozy, 2007)

Even as he reechoed some of the negative identities of this continent, Sarkozy urged us to draw “from the African imaginary world that” our forefathers bestowed upon us, which include our stories, proverbs, and rites. In his opinion, by “drawing from all these forms that, since the dawn of time were transmitted to and enriched generation after generation ...,” we will ably “find the imagination and the power to invent” our future. Until we rise up to the task of deconstructing and reinventing our identities, we may never escape the ridicule of the West and emancipate ourselves in economic terms, because our identities within the world system are closely intertwined with our slow growth.

The early 1990s marked the emergence of post-development and clearly the end of the era of development, because critics believed its classical approaches had been ineffective. Located in Foucauldian

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postmodernist ideologies (Faucault & Gordon, 1980), post-development presents alternatives to development and rejects classical development paradigms. It questions the validity in the generalist perspectives of enlightenment, positivism, objectivism, and grand theories, like modernization, upon which our development programmes were founded (Escobar, 2000; 1992). As they condemn the world systems' hierarchichization of cultures and knowledge, postmodernism and post-development perspectives advocate deconstructionism and underscore localism (Rorty, 1995), an approach that Sarkozy implicitly recommended: "Africa's challenge is to enter ... into history," ... "to take from it, the energy, the force, the desire, the willingness to listen and to espouse its own history." Etymologically, to deconstruct means "to undo" (Johnson, 1980). Through deconstructionism, we are encouraged to strengthen our possibilities of self-reliance and functional growth. To deconstruct, we need to recontextualize our identities, celebrate our differences, and critically reappraise the identities that processes of exploitation, colonization, enslavement, post colonialism, and economic dependence bestowed on us. We need to question the validity in the meanings associated with our cultures and Africanness.

The post-development approach is criticized for ethnocentrism, but I am happy to promote Africanism than slander it. Nevertheless, we must be more responsible than just promoting African cultures because such will be meaningless without intensifying the empowerment of women and children and eliminating possibilities of culturally entrenched abuses. Is it sufficient to require that we preserve the positions of running mates for women at gubernatorial levels? How about providing them adequate resources to campaign at all levels with their male counterparts? If we look around us and at this podium, we notice very successful women competing outstandingly with their

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male counterparts while managing their homes, but how many are they? How much are we willing to eradicate female genital mutilation and child marriages? How ready are we to eliminate excessive glorification of corruption, as is depicted in this picture (Odunayo, 2014)? How do we emphasize our differences positively and turn the negative images into live capital? These are a few questions to ponder as we deconstruct.



## STEPTWO: REVIVING OUR DEAD CAPITAL

First conceptualized by Hernando de Soto, a former Peruvian president and sociologist, “dead capital” refers to property that is informally held and is not legally recognized or in Skibola's (2011) terms, “Dead Capital is considered lost value because the landholder is unable to transfer or leverage his property for capital or capital access.” In his book, the *Mystery of Capital: Why Capitalism Triumphs in the West but Fails Everywhere Else*, de Soto (2000) argues that poor people are not poor because they do not have

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possessions, but because they are unable to generate value from their possessions. A juxtaposition of this assertion onto the African situation illuminates my argument that the problem of Africa is not poverty but our inability to explore and maximize the utilization of our resources – and to that, I add waste. De Soto's work questioned the rationality of the dependence on the international community for bailout and/or the validation of our internally developed growth strategies when over \$9 billion assets waste away in dead capital in non-Western nations (Skibola, 2011). He called on struggling nations to examine the possessions of the poor, and to turn them into money-making assets by integrating them into the formal sector through registration. He identified five mysteries of capital that were missing in non-Western economies: the mysteries of (a) missing information, (b) capital, (c) political awareness, (d) missing lessons of US history, and (e) legal failures.

I reorganize these mysteries into the mysteries of: (a) functional institutions, (b) information, and (c) capital. The institutions of concern here are the family, religion, polity, education, judiciary, and the media (which significantly overlaps the mystery of information). Considering our focus on deconstructionism, I evaluate these on grounds of their strengths and functionality in contemporary African cultures and perceive the institutions of the family and religion as the strongest among them all. Irrespective of the strains and weaknesses of the others, African families typically stick together and provide support systems through traditional fosterage and extended family ties. Even as the interplay of social change and cultural diffusion reform our family systems, the core values sustaining their structures have remained intact. Therefore, as we deconstruct, the provision of facilities to underprivileged households may enhance changes we propose in the other institutions. Through the years, like our family

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institutions, religious organizations have been strong forces to reckon with. The influence and charisma of the leadership of our religious groups, irrespective of the denomination or sect, could be mobilized to foster localized change.

The quasi democracies we have could be overhauled and in ways that support the promotion of deconstructions and localism. The eras of vote-buying and misinformation leading to tainted political processes could be improved. We are riddled with political ideologies some of which contradict the realities facing West Africans. Some politicians claim allegiance to conservatism but demonstrate limited interest in competitive growth among citizens. We also have social democrats whose members flagrantly pursue selfish accumulation of wealth while the masses peril. Therefore, irrespective of the political system or ideology of choice, we still endure the challenges of cancerous ineptitude, which obstructed successful implementation of growth plans decades ago (see cartoon below: courtesy Cable Magazine, 2011).





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De Soto blamed dead capital on corruption and disconnections within the legal systems of non-Western nations and the formal sectors. For the judiciary to be functional in the development of live capital, it must fairly administer justice, and its auxiliary roles in formalizing extra-legal properties and businesses for purposes of investments should be impeccable. Therefore, when our courts set unrealistic bail requirements, sentence goat thieves to over 20 years in prison but liberate leaders who squander millions, when they keep suspected offenders behind bars for over six years without trial or charges, or disregard the years spent prior to sentencing, they do not merely foster disconnections within our criminal justice systems and prison overpopulation, contribute to the abuse of sparse resources, fail to deter white collar crimes, and deprive access to youthful labour, but also join others to impede the revival of our dead capital, the emergence of new capitalists, and our overall economic growth. Our courts seem to exist for the rich and powerful, and thus are not sufficiently supportive of prospective entrants into the business world. The demotivating effects of the non-integrative nature of the judiciary are further compounded by bottlenecks within the mystery of information.

I conceptualize the mystery of information in terms of its accessibility. It defines individual citizen's ability to access, process, and utilize information for individual household and communal good. We may also perceive it in terms of how organizations, including governments and bankers, capture and utilize information on household possessions that have the potential of transformation into capital. De Soto believed, for example, that we could revive our dead capital by generating databases for them, so they could be utilized as collateral for loans as start up capital or for expansions in small-scale businesses. To this end, we notice the connection between the mystery of capital and the mystery of information.

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According to de Soto, the mystery of capital thrives on the success of the other mysteries and formal property rights. He posited that non-Western nations lacked property agreements appropriately integrated into one formal legal system and maintained: “The reason capitalism has triumphed in the West and sputtered in the rest of the world is because most of the assets in Western nations have been integrated into one formal representational system” (De Soto, 2002: 53). Similarly, I hold the view that effective mysteries of information and institutions will culminate in successful transformation of the dead capital partially through deconstructions and the associated localism in pursuit of our unique strengths and positive identities. Through effective databases and legal systems that hold individuals sufficiently but fairly responsible for their actions without regard for social standing, we may be able to encourage confidence in individuals who would otherwise be excluded from the formal sector.

## CONCLUSION

Since the 1960s, African nations have performed abysmally – and extremely effectively at that – stripping our citizens of power, progress, and humanism while simultaneously embracing with passion, negative identities and images detrimental to our growth. The attainment of political independence and the choices of dependency and modernization plunged us deeper into the world systems, not as equal partners, but as dependents and champions of the periphery noted for subservency, deprivation, and vulnerability. In economic terms, our dependency and peripheral locations were suggestive of long-term trade imbalances, deficits, and limited foreign exchange earnings. It beats my imagination how these could propel us onto the promised land of managing our own affairs and personality, particularly when such effects compete with our home brewed

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problems of corruption, mismanagement, nepotism, bribery, and dysfunctional institutions. I do not in any way advocate the secession of African nations from the world systems. Rather, I endorse the optimism of the African-centered growth and development that the men and women who spearheaded our freedom instigated. For nearly six decades, we have fought, struggled, and either failed or made only marginal progress (Dambosa, 2010). Where do we go from here? How do we establish the foundation so proclaimed several decades ago, and what identities do we project for ourselves? Who speaks for Africa? And how do we build that Africa capable of managing its own affairs?



In this lecture, I outlined connections among our negative images, identities, and poor economic performance. I recommended deconstructionism so as to debunk the negativities while promoting our rich cultural diversities, which set us apart from all others. Of course, Africa is not a country, and it is ready for rebranding and recontextualizing. We probably may not have to turn the world map upside down as McArthur's Universal Corrective map (Danforth, 2014) depicts above, but the need to exit our perpetual mode of modernization and dependency driven development to usher

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ourselves into the post-development era of self-reliance and localism cannot be overemphasized. Let us embark on a deconstructionist approach to transformation that adopts the positive components of modernization. In the post-development Africa that this presentation promotes, we need to appreciate and celebrate our domestic knowledge, culture, and resources. For over fifty years, our dependence on foreign aid has been detrimental; yet, we have failed to advocate locally acquired programmes fittingly valuable to our citizens and judiciously centered on our unique characteristics. We hear discussions revolving around human development indices, participatory planning, and the approaches of shared growth and development agenda, but we need to ask, have these approaches and impacts of these varied projects been different from those that conspicuously emphasized modernization, neoliberalism, and economic growth? Over the years, have these programmes demonstrated any dissimilarity in their structures, modes of implementation, and objectives?

**MAY GOD ETERNALLY BLESS US ALL!**



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